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ABSTRACT

This paper urges the curriculum developer to assume the accountability for his decisions necessitated by the actual ways our society functions. The curriculum developer is encouraged to recognize that he is a salesman with a commodity (the curriculum). He is urged to realize that if he cannot market the package to the customers (the various interest groups) the curriculum-commodity will go unconsumed, no matter what its virtues. The acceptance or rejection of a curriculum by the consumers represents the accountability of the curriculum developer. He has to be aware of the relative "clout" wielded by various interest groups and be prepared, in advance, to demonstrate that his product (curriculum) is what they want and need. He must do this particularly at the "major moments" (need assessment, curriculum goals, content, methodology and format) in the developmental process, when the interest groups direct their claims of accountability. The curriculum developer needs help to prepare for these major moments, and, therefore, has need of an evaluator. The evaluator can function in the role of a sort of market research analyst, identifying "pockets of potential persuasion" and aiding in packaging the curriculum-commodity so that it will be most interesting and useful to the consumers. (MH)

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PROCESS ACCOUNTABILITY IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT[1]

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The Case for Accountability

The politician studies problems, consults his constituents, notes his constraints, weighs his alternatives, and anticipates consequences. He seeks to understand both cause and effect. So also does the educator.

The politician, however, has learned the intricacies of accountability to a greater extent than has the educator. The politician knows the pressures and consequences of being held accountable by a wide variety of groups and individuals for his decisions. Experience has taught him to be sensitive to the needs, goals, and expectations of his constituency, his colleagues, indeed of his society. The politician's search for answers, guided primarily by his experience, his beliefs, and his insight, is realistically influenced by those to whom he is, fairly or unfairly, held accountable.

Accountability applies not only to the politician, but to the doctor, the office manager, the plumber, the newsboy. The degree to which each is held accountable is a function of the kind of service he provides, and of the people who receive it.

And the curriculum developer? He too seeks answers, but his service requires more: He must convey those answers to a large number of other people. Can he be held accountable? It is our contention that the curriculum developer *can* be held accountable for a number of decisions, by a number of groups (audiences), for a number of reasons. Further, we contend that the curriculum developer has an obligation to attend to the needs, goals, and expectations of the myriad of special interest groups as they relate to the decisions he makes.

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[1]This draft supercedes earlier drafts.

The genesis of our remarks must be attributed to our involvement in the world of evaluation. We thus begin with some bias toward the belief that evaluation, as we conceive the term and the process, can be of use to the curriculum developer, not only in his evaluation of student outcomes resulting from the implementation of a curriculum, but also in the developmental process itself. Our observations about curriculum, evaluation, and accountability are not offered as a grandiose analysis of curricular problems, but rather as a statement of our perception of one purpose evaluation can play in curriculum development. We raise more questions than answers. The examples we include are illustrative, not definitive.

Traditionally curriculum developers have focused their attention solely on the intents, contents, and methodologies of an instructional package, to the exclusion of the audiences who will react to decisions they make. Usually if attention is paid to an audience, it is given to teachers and students, in terms of "what's best for them," not "what are they thinking, feeling, demanding." To be sure, some audiences suggest only generalities: "The school should teach my child how to prepare for adult life." Other audiences suggest specifics: "Teach my child how to read." In both instances, it remains for the curriculum developer to develop the details of a curriculum. Nonetheless, even the generalities espoused by the various audiences provide meaningful cues for the curriculum developer concerned about building and implementing his curriculum.

Any curriculum tends to touch a variety of people, in a variety of ways, at a variety of times. These various groups can be viewed as audiences who come with various biases and demands, public and private concerns, and motives of assorted legitimacies: Each of these "pockets of persuasion" may serve its notice of accountability to the curriculum developer. The amount of "clout" they possess in serving that notice is not at question here; the reality of their

existence is. The manner in which the developer must account for (report, explain, or justify) the curriculum will differ according to who is raising the questions, what those questions are about, and when they are raised.

Curriculum Development

Curriculum development *may* be seen as a series of decision points at each of which an alternative, or combination of alternatives, is selected by some process. The alternative selected at each decision point determines subsequent developmental procedures.

Noticeably absent from this view of curriculum development is any mention of goals, content, or methodology. Each of these factors is involved in the development of a curriculum, of course. But the *process* of curriculum development, as we see it, can be best described in terms of: a) decisions to be made; and b) people who make and influence the decisions.

In the development of a curriculum of national scope, a vast number of decisions must be made by a wide variety of decision-makers. Many of these decisions are made on a daily basis; many are implicit, a few explicit. There exists, however, some decisions that must be made explicitly. These decisions determine the ultimate nature of the curriculum package. The *major moments* are the focal points in the decision-making process, and, as such, are the points at which various interest groups may direct their claims of accountability.

Figure 1 illustrates a very general conception of the curriculum development process. We have identified five major moments in the development of the curriculum package. Field testing is a major moment also, as "Go or No-Go" decisions related to the curriculum package as a whole or parts of it thereof are sought prior to consumer purchase of the package.

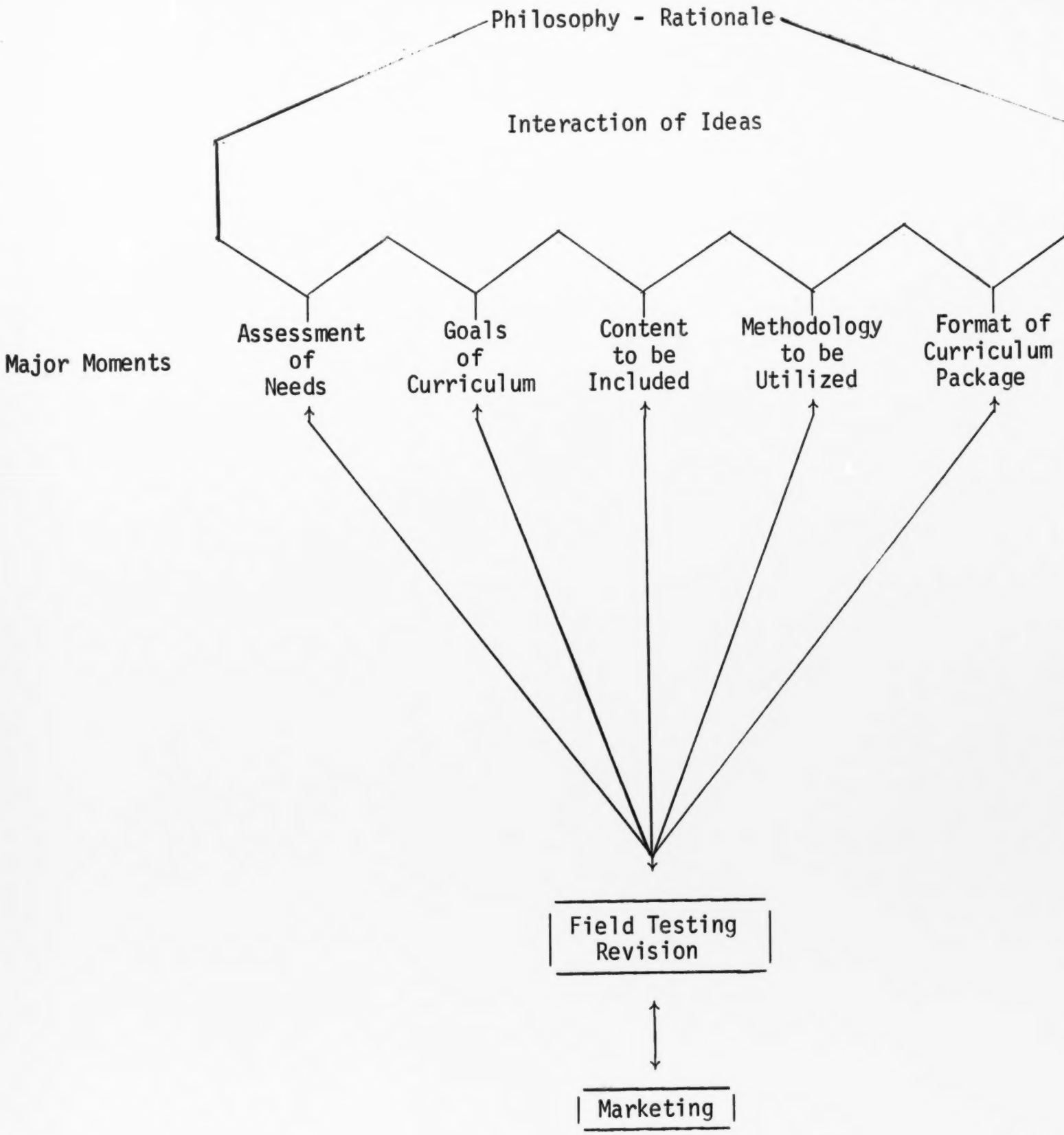

Figure 1. The Process of Curriculum Development

A continual process of interaction, over time, occurs among ideas brought into play by the curriculum developers. Thus ideas about content interact with ideas about goals, as well as ideas about methodology and ideas about the format of the package. As the development process unfolds, widely divergent ideas may be expressed. Daily decisions will be made about some of these ideas; some will be eliminated, some kept, and some revised. However, a number of "ultimate" decisions must be made: debate about which goals to pursue cannot continue indefinitely; some content must be selected, a methodology suggested, a format chosen. These "ultimate" decisions we have called major moments.

In some instances, the decision made at a major moment may actually have been made early in the development of the curriculum package. The needs to which the developers address themselves may have, for example, been determined early by a few prominent individuals (subject matter scholars), or by an influential group (professional society), or by the curriculum development team itself. The developmental process may not have included a great deal of debate about needs. The decision made about needs, however, will greatly influence decisions made about other elements of the development project. Over time, ideas will undergo constant scrutiny and change, as each element affects thinking about the others.

We have chosen to "cap" our model with the philosophy or rationale for the developmental process. The rationale for the curriculum being developed defines, in some sense, the parameters of the project. The interaction of ideas about content, methodology and all other relevant (and irrelevant) variables is bounded by the developer's rationale. To be sure, this rationale may not always be clearly discernible, thus presenting problems for the evaluator, those working on the curriculum, as well as those who finally *use* the curriculum. The evaluator may see as a part of his responsibility an attempt to have the rationale clearly stated by the curriculum developer.

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Curriculum development, viewed as a series of decisions about the curriculum package and its testing, usually involves a host of people only some of whom are directly connected with the curriculum project. Each person who is directly involved brings his beliefs, attitudes, values, and assumptions to the decision points. Each represents a perspective influence on the final shape of the package. It may be difficult to separate the decision from the man who most influenced it.

Our treatment of curriculum development has been brief, but we hope these statements provide a frame of reference for subsequent remarks. The major moments we have identified may be too many, too few, or too vague. Nonetheless, the idea of major moments suggests a rather unique role for evaluation in the curriculum process.

One Role for Evaluation

Those involved in the work of developing a curriculum package make the decision suggested by each major moment. We contend that the curriculum developers' decisions should not be made without a careful analysis of the "hopes, fears, and aspirations," (not to mention the *demands*) of the several audiences who are but indirectly connected with the curriculum project, yet who might reasonably lay claim to providing input into each major moment.

This is the problem -- parties interested in the curriculum development and outcome are often not at the decision-making scene. They appear later, to directly voice their protest against a decision made earlier, or to displace their protest toward an object (e.g., school tax issue) which they themselves can influence directly. They question the alternatives from which a choice was selected; they hold the distributor (the school) accountable for what the developer did, or failed to do. Educators repeatedly find themselves backpedaling

to rationalize a decision already made, rather than anticipating the nature of the demand and inquiry *prior* to making decisions.

Exit for now the mode of evaluation concerned with outcomes, statistics, and compare-this-program-to-another, and enter evaluation operating in a who's-asking-what, who's-doing-what, how-do-the-groups-with-an-interest-stack-up-in terms-of-potential-influence mode. In this mode, evaluation raises many questions (few answers), alerts the curriculum developer (sensitizes?), and causes a lot of concern about justifying, explaining, relating. It's not a comfortable mode. But neither is it comfortable to be holding a beautifully structured, logically sequenced curriculum that no one can or will let into his schools!

Consider, if you will, the major moment; "What are the objectives of our proposed social studies curriculum package?" Suppose we decide our curriculum ought to enable students to think critically about our social system -- a reasonable objective. Some of the "best" minds tell us this is the essence of social studies; students must learn critical thinking. With that decided, move on to deciding content and methodology and format.

But why was that one objective chosen to the exclusion of others? Members of a discipline-oriented audience may not see it as an appropriate objective. A culturally-different audience is likely to say "Forget critical thinking; let's tell it (the social system) as it is." A parent audience wants to know the relationship between a curriculum centered around this objective and the skills college entrance exams measure. And so it goes. These groups may be verbal and are likely to exert their influence on the curriculum distributor (the school): the telephone rings, the principal and the superintendent incur pressure, the school board reacts. And that curriculum, with that objective, must go. The curriculum package can be defended by any group of experts who *know* -- but it is gone.

Does the curriculum developer have a responsibility to support the curriculum distributor (the school) as the curriculum consumer (the student) and consumer-related people raise questions? Look at this decision again. What audience may react? What groups may protest, support, resist, affirm? What do they want to know? What are they demanding? What group can you antagonize and still see your curriculum implemented? What are the trade-offs? Where are you likely to be held accountable for failure, and where are you likely to be given credit for accomplishment?

You need not call it evaluation, but we suggest that the curriculum developer spend part of his time identifying audiences, "pockets of potential persuasion." Furthermore, it is not enough merely to acknowledge the existence of different audiences. Judgments made by these audiences about the focus of the major moments and the reasons given for decisions made at these moments must be ascertained and considered by the developer in his decision-making. The developer, or the evaluator, may be able to uncover (not by second guessing but by direct inquiry) the questions these groups will be asking, the claims they will be making, the axes they seem to want to grind. Armed with that information, the developer, or evaluator, can determine what kinds of data should be ready for use in response to potential questions. Perhaps more important, the data can be used as developmental input; it can exert an influence on what is developed. The curriculum developer cannot follow suggestions made by all audiences, nor should he. Suggestions may be in direct opposition to each other, for example. However, by considering possible suggestions and possible demands the developer has determined, before the fact, what the consequences of not attending to a particular suggestion or group might be. He need not yield only to those who speak the loudest; he may not follow the demands of audiences. He <u>does</u> need to know what people want and think, if only to know better how he is to report, explain, or justify what has been done, and why.

Selling your expert's soul? Yielding principle to pressure? Not as we see it. Evaluation, by identifying questions, groups, and data available, enables the curriculum developer to confront reality nose-to-nose. The expert skills of the curriculum developer include the ability to successfully combine the substance and methodology of a certain discipline, with the expectations of audiences who come in contact with the developmental process and the curriculum package. To operate effectively in a democratic, pluralistic society such as ours, a few knowledgable professionals can no longer decide without serious consultation for so many other publics. The question is how to best provide an educational commodity responsive to all who will be affected by it, and how to best explain that commodity in a manner that is understandable to the consumer.

Evaluation in the Scheme of Things

Evaluation is not usually seen as an explicit and systematic part of the process of curriculum development. To be sure, the process is not without the informal, daily evaluation that occurs in any endeavor which brings talent and effort together for some common end. What we are suggesting is that by using a more formal system of evaluation, the curriculum developer can promote action, rather than mere reaction: He may anticipate audience reaction *before* it happens, thus reducing the necessity for the curriculum developer and distributor to react rather than constructively act.

If the reader will buy, if only for the moment, the validity of what we have suggested, he must ask, "Who is to do all that has been suggested?" The curriculum developer recognizes the need for other kinds of evaluation, such as student outcomes measurement and product evaluation. From the very practical standpoint of time and expertise, the developer cannot perform all the evaluative tasks needed. Thus, the curriculum development *team* may well include an evaluator.

There are a number of roles the evaluator can play in the performance of this task. He may be a raiser of questions; he may collect and interpret data; he may serve as judge. In our scheme, the evaluator collects, throughout the developmental process, data about what the audiences are thinking, feeling, and wanting with respect to various developmental foci. He may, after appropriate study of the data, interpret what he has found for or with the curriculum developer, thus continually reminding the curriculum developer of his accountability. The evaluator can be the amplifier of consumer demands, as well as the communicator of curriculum distributor needs.

Perhaps the most difficult task facing the curriculum development team is the integration of accountabilities to create a curriculum that is most responsive to the audiences that are affected by it. The evaluator is not unlike the symphony conductor who must blend individual sounds into a pleasing composite for his audience. The evaluator must amplify some audience demands, increase the fidelity of others, filter others, and eliminate still others in his attempt to help the curriculum development team determine the best combination of accountabilities.

Implicit (and unfortunately, usually *too* implicit) in all of this are the value systems of everyone concerned with curriculum development and usage. The developers value some things more than others; their product reflects their value orientations. But what of the values of other audiences, particularly the consumer-related people? Potential conflict is only too apparent. The developers of curriculum err when they do not consider the values of those who will use the curriculum package. The introduction of sex education courses is a case in point. Valuable though such courses may be, their impact will not be felt if the value orientations of the potential consumer-related persons block implementation of the program.

Again, the evaluator serves the function of providing information about consumer values to the curriculum developer. The object of this information is not to rule out all things contrary to the expressed values of the consumer, but rather to utilize knowledge about consumer values in the most appropriate means for organizing, explaining, and justifying the curriculum package. It just may be that "a curriculum in operation is worth two on the shelf," assuming that the curriculum in operation has been carefully and thoughtfully evaluated throughout the developmental process.

Curriculum development involves a lot of decisions. Some of these decisions, which we have called *major moments*, determine the ultimate format of the curriculum. The curriculum developer can be held accountable for the decision he makes at each of these major moments. There exists a wide variety of audiences to whom, fairly or unfairly, the developer is accountable. The success of the curriculum package that is developed will depend greatly on the extent to which the developer has recognized and acted upon his accountabilities.

Evaluation can play many roles in curriculum development and implementation. One role for evaluation I emphasized here concerns what has traditionally been denied by curriculum developers, not what they have affirmed. This role involves the identification of "pockets of potential persuasion": evaluation can seek to provide information about demands, assumptions, values, and beliefs held by these pockets, and to present this information in a manner useful to the curriculum developer in his attempt to build an interesting, useful curriculum. The evaluator, as part of the curriculum development team, provides throughout the developmental process the incentive and capability to act, rather than only react.

Bob Ogle put it nicely: The evaluator can help bridge the *accountability gap*.